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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000819

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SUBJECT: AFGHAN FM SPANTA ON RUSSIA, PAKISTAN AND ELECTIONS

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: In a March 27 meeting with SCA DAS Moon, Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta, who was in Moscow to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Conference on Afghanistan, expressed concern with the proposal made by the organization to establish a "security belt" around Afghanistan, which he considered a ploy to extend Russian influence in the region. Reconciling with Russia would be difficult for Afghans, but Spanta welcomed Russian interest in reconstructing Afghan infrastructure as a first step. Spanta warned that the "deep state," and not the elected government, controlled the situation in Pakistan, and urged the U.S. to help bring the Pakistani military and ISI under effective civilian control. Spanta predicted that Chief Justice Azimi would soon suggest a constitutional solution to continuing the Karzai government beyond May 21, and warmly welcomed the U.S. decision to open consulates in Herat and Mazar-e Sharif. End summary.

Security Belt Implies Russian Influence

12. (C) During a March 27 meeting held before the opening of the Russian-hosted SCO Conference on Afghanistan, SCA DAS Moon explained to Afghan FM Spanta that the U.S. objective in attending the conference was to demonstrate support for international efforts to assist Afghanistan (septel). Spanta raised Afghan concern with the SCO proposal to establish a "security belt" around Afghanistan, which was included in the draft declaration to be signed by conference attendees. The "main intent" of this concept was the "reconstruction" of Russian influence in Central Asia, which was not in the interests of Afghanistan, its neighbors, or the U.S., in Spanta's estimation. Moon agreed that the term should not be included in the conference declaration and committed to seek its deletion. Spanta asked Moon to support the Afghan position that language on anti-corruption measures should not be included in the declaration as well. Constructive criticism was helpful, but Spanta feared that some countries might use such language in less helpful ways. Moon said the U.S. was working to remove the language.

13. (C) Spanta explained that it was difficult for Afghans to consider full engagement with Russia, a country with which "real reconciliation" would be difficult because of all the "death and destruction" caused during the Soviet era. He thought that the prospect of Russian involvement in the reconstruction of the Salang Tunnel offered a good beginning for cooperation, and hoped Moscow would finance the project (septel).

U.S. Must Address the "Deep State" in Pakistan

14. (C) Spanta said that Afghanistan enjoyed "good relations" with the civilian government of Pakistan, but warned that the "deep state" and not the government made the real decisions. The civilian government had democratic support, but this was not identical to institutional support. He asked that Afghanistan's friends in Washington show caution in their dealings with Islamabad, and understand that while it was important to address the "social problems" that fueled terrorism in the region, the Taliban remained under the protection of the Pakistani military and ISI in the tribal areas. He advised assisting Pakistan's democratic government in bringing these "parallel institutions" under control. If not, the U.S. would repeat the mistake of spending what Spanta estimated at \$11 billion in support of Musharraf, with little impact upon the terrorists.

15. (C) Moon responded that the U.S. and Pakistan had an open relationship that relied upon such candor. He assured Spanta that the U.S. was working with the Pakistani military to strengthen its support for the civilian government. The U.S. would also continue the tri-lateral process of bringing together Afghanistan and Pakistan to address common security concerns. Spanta said that he hoped the Turkish-led trilateral process would also enhance regional cooperation, and he looked forward to the April 1 meeting that would include political, military, and intelligence agency leaders from Kabul, Islamabad, and Ankara.

Afghan Presidential Election

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16. (C) Spanta said that the Afghan government understood that the success of the presidential election was of paramount importance, and ensuring continuity and stability during the interim government that would serve from May 21 to August 20 would be a key task. Karzai was attempting to work with Parliament to devise a solution and avoid a political vacuum during this period. The "fragmentation of the political class" has always been a problem in Afghanistan, according to Spanta, who hoped the Supreme Court Chief Justice would identify a constitutional solution for the Karzai government to remain in place from May 22 through the election process. Moon responded that the U.S. was encouraged by the consensus reached on the August 20 election date, which suggested that agreement could be reached in Kabul on an interim government.

U.S. Consulates/Ambassador

17. (C) Spanta praised the U.S. decision to open consulates at Herat and Mazar-e Sharif as a positive gesture that would allow the U.S. a greater institutional presence outside Kabul. Spanta said that he knew of no objections to the naming of Karl Eikenberry, "a good friend of Afghanistan and a good choice," as the new U.S. Ambassador.

18. (U) DAS Moon has cleared this cable.
BEYRLE